

Service members celebrate black history in Africa

Story and Photo by Cpl. Adam C. Schnell

CAMP LEMONIER, Djibouti – “Our nation is a rainbow, red, yellow, brown, black and white, we’re all precious in God’s sight.”

Jesse Jackson said this on July 17, 1984, a quote that hits home for members of Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa where troops come from different services as well as backgrounds-celebrating Black History Month.

The month was full of activities including singing, dancing, sporting events, movie night and lectures about prominent individuals in black history. Many cultural events also happened with the local people celebrating Black History Month like soul food sampling here and Djiboutian food sampling in Djibouti City.

“It was great getting together with the Djiboutian Black History Month members,” said Air Force Capt. Shawanda A. Primm, data systems officer for CJTF-HOA. “I think we all learned a lot from each other.”

To kick off the festivities for the month, more than 50 service members from Camp Lemonier attended a reception in Djibouti City to celebrate black history with members of local community.

“What better place to celebrate black history than in Africa where it started,” said Primm, an Aliceville, Ala., native. “It was a great opportunity to learn more about history, and also build friendships within the community.”

Many service members said the best part of being in the group was sharing cultures with the people in the community. Before each of them arrived here, many never thought they would be given the chance to share American culture with people from a different country.

“I know that we will leave a major impression here,” said Lance Cpl. Matthew Marcellus, an aircrew survival equipmentman for Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 464. “An impression that Americans are much more than they expected.”

Along with building relationships outside the gates here, the Black History Month meetings helped bring out the “joint” in Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa. Being in an environment with many services, which have different regulations, can be quite difficult to get used to.

“This is my first time in a joint environment,” said Petty Officer 2nd Class Calvin O. Wright, a supply clerk with CJTF-HOA. “The group really helped me get to know other services better.”

As the members began to get to know each other and break through the perceptions of their branch of service, friendships between each other began building. For many of them, saying goodbye will be hard, but the life-long friendships they have built will remain.

“I got to show them a side of the Marine Corps they may have never seen before,” said Marcellus.

Marcellus, a Gainesville, Fla., native said looking

past the uniform was not a very difficult thing to do because history has taught him to look first at the person inside.

Even though history was a very important part of the month’s events, members of the group said that much more than that was celebrated. It is also about celebrating different cultures coming together and giving back to the community.

“I believe community service is a big part of the month also,” said Primm.

To try and give back to the community, service members traveled to a local girls’ orphanage. The group spent time with the children by singing, dancing and playing games.

“Just seeing the joy on the faces of the children when we were singing there made it all worthwhile,” said Wright.

Spreading cheer to others has always been a big part of Black History Month, which started in 1924, first known as Negro History Week. February was chosen to host Black History Month for many reasons, but primarily because it marks the birthdays of two men who significantly influenced the black American population, Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass.

But much like the mind-set of prominent individuals in black history, once the celebrating is finished, minds must turn to the future.

“Progress celebrated, but work remains,” said Primm.



The Camp Lemonier Gospel Singers, led by Master Gunnery Sgt. Lloyd L. Hampton, contracting officer for Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa, sing a song during a Black History Month gospel service here Feb. 22. The group participated in many events to include a reception in Djibouti City and a local girls orphanage.